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ABSTRACT

The question of evaluating effective teaching in light of the fact that teaching is still the principal function of the university is addressed. Most faculty receive very little specific training in teaching, even though the skills involved are complex and sophisticated. There is a dual responsibility for evaluation of teaching by faculty and administration, a type of collaboration that corresponds to the way most contemporary Canadian universities are governed. The main responsibility of the administration should be to provide a climate within which effective teaching and learning can occur. A teaching resource center, sabbatical leaves, and research and development grants for faculty are examples of encouragement or rewards provided to teachers for initiatives they may take. Faculty should not be constrained from practicing new approaches in their teaching. Teachers should provide information about their teaching performance that could be used for evaluation purposes. A teaching dossier might contain summaries of student course evaluations, comments by colleagues on the quality of the material presented in class, descriptions of innovative teaching and learning techniques, and evidence of some gain in knowledge or experience on the part of students. It is suggested that teachers should claim credit for good teaching in the same way as they would take the responsibility to document scholarly endeavors and administrative work. The involvement or concerns of students and the community in the evaluation of teaching performance is also discussed. (SW)

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EFFECTIVE TEACHING AND ITS EVALUATION

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Criteria of faculty performance

A few years ago the Canadian Association of University Teachers undertook a survey of salary policies in Canadian universities (see Knapper, 1974). Results of the study showed that universities across the country were fairly unanimous in recognizing three or four basic qualities a faculty member must display in order to be granted tenure, receive a merit increment, or be promoted. The first three criteria were competence in teaching, scholarly or research capabilities, and involvement in the various administrative chores that are necessary today in most academic settings. A fourth area of contribution, specified by about half the institutions surveyed, was that of work done directly for the community at large. Although teaching was placed first on the list by the majority of universities responding, it is one of the worst-guarded secrets in administrative circles that the efforts being made to evaluate teaching are really quite crude, where they exist at all.

The present paper is primarily concerned with the question of evaluating effective teaching, but this by no means implies that teaching is the only professorial responsibility being assessed in an unsatisfactory way. Certainly it is easy to count up the number of papers a faculty member has published or to make a list of the number of committees on which he has served, but this may be an extremely poor guide to that person's scholarship or contribution to the smooth running of the academic community. In a recent Canadian publication on the evaluation of instruction in higher education (Knapper, Geis, Pascal, & Shore, 1976) the point is made by a number of writers that activities like research, administrative ability, public service, and so on - things which have

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been generally assumed to be easily appraised - should be subject to at least the same kind of scrutiny as that which is now being recommended for the teaching activity. Thus it might be asked not just how many papers a professor has published or how much money he has obtained in the way of research grants, but also what was the quality of the research, what was the impact of its findings on colleagues or the community at large? Similarily, instead of counting up committee memberships, consideration might be given to how well the committee functioned, what changes it effected, and so on.

Notwithstanding these comments, it is probably true that the evaluation of teaching performance in universities is even more unreliable than assessments of research or administrative duties. One reason for this is that teaching has become such a lonely occupation. While only fellow committee members have to tolerate our long rambling speeches, and while our papers may go unread except by the journal editor and two referees, it is probably the case that not one colleague has ever watched us perform in the classroom or in our various more private teaching activities. In this respect even the most general form of feedback about teaching performance is likely to be enlightening, and hence helpful. But at the same time such information may also be startling and threatening.

A second point to be made about university teaching is that faculty are usually very sensitive about their performance in this area. Much has been written to suggest that university professors are cavalier about their approach to teaching, but this generalization has to be viewed with a considerable degree of caution. While it cannot be denied that some instruction in universities leaves a lot to be desired, there are probably few professors who will openly admit that they are bad teachers or that they see teaching as unimportant.

In contrast, the number of university faculty actively involved in research is much less than many university administrators would have us believe (for example, among academic psychologists in the United States the median number of publications is apparently zero), and it is still quite acceptable to shrug off a lack of scholarly activity by a cryptic reference to the "publish or perish" phenomenon. As far as administrative contributions to the university are concerned, it is often easy to explain away the failure to take on such duties in terms of a desire to avoid bureaucracy and concentrate instead on the "real" function of the university. It is probable then that - at least for many disciplines - a professor can live with the reputation of being uninterested in research or committee work, but will find it much more embarrassing to be stigmatized as a poor teacher. Teaching appears to be one of those activities, like driving or sex, where we are particularily sensitive to criticism!

At the same time, promoting learning has always been the central role of the university, and with the rapid rise in student intake since the second world war it is not sufficient to assume that learning will take place without difficulty as long as students have access to a library and a few lectures by eminent scholars. Rather, today a professor must become an expert in the <u>facilitation</u> of learning - which is another definition of teaching.

<u>The central role of teaching</u>.

There is probably little quarrel that teaching is still the principal function of the university. It is also well known that most faculty receive very little specific training in teaching, even though the skills involved are widely regarded as complex and sophisticated. Of course, some academics would deny that any sophistication in teaching skills is necessary, and would maintain

that university education simply involves exposing students to the appropriate subject-matter, and letting them learn for themselves (see Anderson, 1974).

It has already been argued above that this is an untenable position in today's Canadian university environment. But saying that teaching is a difficult and complicated endeavour unfortunately does not mean that a lengthy immersion course in the principles of pedagogy will work the wonders that some educationists believe. In fact it could be maintained that the psychological principles derived from studies over the last fifty years have proved of remarkably little value for the everyday work of the classroom teacher. It is known that people must be motivated to learn, and that they learn better when pursuing some tangible reward. Psychologists are also beginning, through the work of Piaget, to uncover some fascinating information about the way young children think, which will have great implications for the way they are taught. Yet serious doubts remain about whether exposure to the findings of learning theorists, from Hull to Skinner, will help Professor X improve his teaching, any more than will a conversation with a sympathetic colleague, or the comments of his students.

The fact that there are no pedagogical rules of thumb to ensure effective teaching makes it even more necessary that the university instructor constantly monitor his activities in the classroom. Thus the aim of evaluation is first and foremost to provide a source of information to the teacher about what he is doing and it also follows that evaluation should be as comprehensive as possible. For example, student questionnaires can provide invaluable information about the practical organization of a class, about the perceived difficulty of assignments, and the extent to which the course is stimulating and enjoyable. But to obtain reliable information about how relevant or up-to-date the material

is, it would be far better to consult colleagues or the department head.

The situation described here is one in which the teacher calls upon others for their advice: the initiative is left with him. It is probable that no other system will work in a university setting, where a good deal of flexibility and freedom has been traditional for many years. There is a dual responsibility here for evaluation of teaching by faculty and administration working together, a type of collaboration which is in keeping with the way most contemporary Canadian universities are governed.

The dual responsibility of faculty and administration.

If the notion that teaching evaluation is a collaborative effort between faculty and administration is accepted, then the next step is to decide what are the rights and responsibilities of the two parties involved. The main responsibility of the administration (ranging from department heads to the President) should be to provide a climate within which effective teaching and learning can prosper. This means the clear articulation of aims for the university which place primary emphasis on teaching, and living up to those aims in practice by, for example, funding a Teaching Resource Person or Centre, encouraging sabbatical and other leaves for the purpose of studying new teaching methods, providing research and development grants for faculty who wish to try new ways of presenting learning material, and so on. Notice that these are not, for the most part, formalized programs, but instead take the form of encouragement and rewards for inititatives taken by individual faculty members. Evidence from various parts of the world suggests that this sort of "grassroots" approach is far more successful in producing changed attitudes and behaviour than many impressive looking series of workshops and conferences on teaching, that may

enhance the prestige of the Vice-President's office, but do little to stimulate cynical faculty and students.

Another aspect of administrative responsibility that is frequently ignored concerns the general organization of instruction in the institution. Faculty who wish to try new approaches to teaching often find they are hamstrung by administrative regulations that are unduly restricting with regard to the timing and format of classes, the type of assignments that may be given, the method of grading, and so on. For example, some deans and department heads get quite nervous when they discover that an instructor is not physically in contact with his entire class for the four hours per week prescribed in the calendar. And deans who are faced with the very high grades often produced by students engaged in self-paced instruction (such as PSI) may be either bewildered or hostile to this departure from the normal distribution of marks.

So much for the responsibilities of the administration in this partnership. It will be seen that they have been mainly concerned with improving the climate for effective teaching, but that there is no direct administrative responsibility for evaluation itself. This is because, for some of the political, social, and psychological reasons alluded to above, it is extremely dubious that an evaluation system imposed from above can succeed. Hopefully, however, if administrators provide appropriate rewards and encouragement, faculty will be motivated to develop and administer their own evaluation systems, if only to demonstrate that their teaching is as good as they say. This may sound naive, but experience with many systems of incentives shows that they will not work unless the people involved are convinced of their utility, clear about their philosophy, and have a meaningful say in their implementation.

While this paper is too short for a full description of the sources of information that might be used for evaluation purposes, it is worth emphasizing again that few contemporary writers on teaching evaluation would be content with a single source - such as the ubiquitous student course rating questionnaire. A number of authors, such as Shore (1974) and Sullivan (1976), have suggested that an instructor should prepare a dossier of evidence to support his claim to be an effective teacher, in much the same way as a curriculum vitae is assembled to describe recent publications, research grants held, committee responsibilities, and so on. Such a dossier might contain summaries of student course evaluations, comments by colleagues on the quality of the material presented in class, descriptions of innovations which have taken place in the course, and (best of all) evidence of some gain in knowledge or experience on the part of students.

The latter index of student achievement, which is really a much more important comment on the value of a course than are the opinions of either students or colleagues, is often difficult to obtain with any precision. (Of course an examination <u>should</u> measure learning, providing there is some indication that students could not already perform at the same level at the beginning of the class.) A good deal has been written about measuring student achievement in relation to specified course objectives (see the bibliography by Geis, 1972) and one unusual way of doing this is to get follow-up comments from employers, who are in a particularily good position to assess the relevance of student knowledge and skill. Unfortunately however, this sort of feedback is only possible in some academic disciplines (such as psychology or engineering) and in any case is hard to measure accurately. Because the measurement of course outcomes (in terms of student achievement or changed attitudes) is not at present

being done very thoroughly or precisely, the evidence a faculty member presents to claim credit for teaching effectiveness may be rather vague. Furthermore, it is likely that such information, albeit incomplete, is nowhere nearly as vague and inaccurate as the more usual comment on teaching in the faculty promotion form, where the department head pens an eloquently equivocal paragraph to describe the performance and effectiveness of a teacher he has never seen perform in the classroom, and with whom he has discussed teaching only in terms of generalities.

It has been suggested above that the onus should be on a faculty member to claim credit for good teaching in just the same way as it is his responsibility to claim credit for scholarly endeavours and administrative work. Some faculty will choose not to defend their teaching, in which case administrators must assume that it is only average, at best - just as a faculty member who did not bother to submit his list of publications for the year would be assumed to have published nothing. In the regular review process that most universities use to appraise faculty performance, some professors will claim credit for excellent teaching, while others will be energetic researchers or provide invaluable administrative or counselling services for the department. A few will excell at many activities, but one of the greatest mistakes made in administering an academic unit is to assume that all members will contribute in the same way by the same means. Once teaching, research, administration and so on are all evaluated to an equal degree, there will emerge a much clearer picture of where faculty talents lie.

This implies, once again, that the university administration should provide sufficient flexibility for the resources in a department to be utilized to their maximum potential. The first step here is to recognize that not all faculty

are good at research, many are terrible administrators, and a few are poor teachers. There should be sufficient freedom to let faculty concentrate on those aspects of the department's work that they do best. As far as teaching is concerned, it is also vital to realize that there are very many ways to teach in a university besides giving lectures or running seminars, and that many informal contacts with students are an important component of the university learning process.

The involvement of students and the community

The bulk of this paper has been devoted to a discussion of evaluation in terms of the responsibilities of two groups - administration and faculty. But there are two further groups whose interests are vitally bound up with the question of teaching effectiveness. The first of these of course is the student body, since students are the people to whom the whole teaching enterprise is directed. (Notice that the reference here is to the teaching enterprise, rather than "learning", which is an activity shared by students and faculty alike.) In the remarks above it has been emphasized that the ultimate test of teaching performance is demonstrated learning - whether of skills, knowledge, or attitudes. It has also been mentioned that student evaluations (by questionnaires, for example) can provide invaluable information about certain aspects of the teaching process. However, because the effective evaluation of teaching involves more than a determination of which professors are perceived to be best by their students, and because evaluation must be an ongoing system for providing faculty with information that will help them improve over time, it is argued that the main impetus for the evaluation of faculty performance must lie with the administrator-faculty partnership discussed above. This is

not to deny that student input to the evaluation process is unique and invaluable. Furthermore it assumes that students will probably continue to carry out their own surveys of teaching, and these may have considerable impact, especially in the absence of other and better data.

The final group with a vested interest in this matter of evaluation larger than faculty, students and administration combined. It comprises the community at large, in whose name every segment of the university claims to speak from time to time, but whose real desires are probably unknown. The contemporary university is a much misunderstood institution, and nowhere is public misunderstanding more prevalent than with regard to the teaching process. In particular, there is often a confusion in the public's mind between formal contact hours in the classroom and the total amount of work done by a professor (for an interesting discussion of this attitude, and the reality of the situation, see Trotter, McQueen, & Hansen, 1973). As the costs of higher education have increased in the past decade, so have the demands by government for public accountability for funds spent. Any valid type of cost-benefit analysis of the universities' achievements is extremely hard to carry out, because of the tremendous difficulty of pinning down the variables involved. In the mid 1960s the Labour Government in Britain tried to apply its prices and incomes policy to university teachers, and suggested that possible indices of "productivity" might include faculty-to-student ratios and student course evaluations. The attempt was eventually abandoned in the face of arguments within the cabinet that to specify the effectiveness of higher education in such relatively crude terms would do more harm than good to the educational enterprise.

Certainly the university is accountable to the public, but it can probably

only be accountable in a very general way, because of the complexity of the many activities undertaken by students and faculty in higher education. It is doubtful whether universities will ever achieve universal popularity among the public at large, regardless of how well they perform. But they must at least be capable of generating a degree of tolerance for the work they are doing, and a public acceptability that the billions of dollars spent on higher education result in some beneficial changes in the quality of life for the population as a whole. To achieve this, universities must not lose sight of their main function, which is to pass on to succeeding generations of students the accumulated wisdom of mankind, and to transmit this knowledge in the most effective way possible. A better understanding of the teaching and learning process is essential to achieve this aim, and ensure the survival of the university as a vital force of influence in the contemporary world.

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